

University Education Politicization in Nigeria: Implications and Ways Forward

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Abstract: Nigerian public universities in recent times have been engulfed with different challenges. Some of the challenges are the indigenization of principal officers/ and the politicization of university education, this paper is aimed to examine the implications of university education politicization in Nigeria. Secondary data and primary data were adopted for the paper. The data were collected from both print and online publications that are related to the title of the paper. The paper concluded that the implication of university education politicization has contributed to the falling standard of university education, poor management, poor international rating, under-development, corruptions and strike actions. The paper recommended that the federal and state government in Nigeria should grant full autonomy to public universities. This will help to prevent political influence in the administration and management of public universities in Nigeria.

Keywords: Implication, Politicization of University Education.

Introduction

The university system globally is designed to operate as an autonomous body whereby decisions and policies for the running of the institutions are taken within the system by the leadership without any interference from the government. University is an autonomous public institution with the general function of providing liberal higher education and encouraging the advancement of learning throughout Nigeria. Autonomy is a principle upon which the higher education system normally operates and through which operational stability and actualization of goals of the higher educational institutions are ensured. When autonomy is enthroned in the right perspective, it then facilitates academic freedom and accountability. The survival of the higher education system is directly proportional to, or to a large extent dependent on the institutionalization of autonomy. Higher education exists to generate and disseminate knowledge and information, which are critical to the development of the individual and society at large. To accomplish these noble goals, autonomy must of necessity be enshrined in the system. This has been the position in place since the inception of the higher education system in the middle ages (NOUN, 2012).

Nigeria's university education is beset more by evidence of systemic maladies rather than salutary breakthroughs. The predicaments commonly characterized by Nigerian higher

institutions of learning since the 1980s, and especially in the 1990 s and this 21st century include obvious inadequacy of funding; low staff motivation; the brain drain syndrome; disproportionate staff-student ratio; and scanty research feats (Okebukola, 2005; NOUN,2012; Ogunode et al, 2021; Ogunode & Adamu, 2021; Ogunode & Atobauka, 2021; Ogunode&Ndayebom, 2022; Ogunode, & Okwelogu, 2022; Ogunode et al, 2022; Ogunode et al, 2022).

Insecurity, poor staff development, poor quality assurance programme; strike actions, poor research programme, ineffective leadership, student problems, corruption, and policies problems (Okeke, 2003; Ademola et al, 2014; Omotere, 2014; Abu, 2015; Alemika, n.d; Adetunji, &Ogunleye, 2015;Daniel-Kalioi, 2019; Ogunode&Ahaotu 2020a; Ogunode&Jegede, 2021; Ogunode et al, 2021; Ogunode, &Oluseun, 2020A). Examination fraud; students versus host community clashes; cultism; students' indecent dress code; drug abuse; violent behaviour and sexual harassment; shallow teaching; financial exploitation of students by lecturers, indigenization of principal officer and political influence or university education politicization among others (Ogunode et al, 2022; Ogunode et al, 2021; Ogunode et al,2021). It is imperative to discuss the implications of politicizing Nigerian university education system.

Objective of this Paper

The objective of this paper is to examine the implications of politicizing Nigerian university education system. The sub-specific objectives include:

1. To look at the concept of university education politicization;
2. To examine the implications of politicizing Nigerian university education system;
3. To suggest to solutions to the problems of university education politicization in Nigeria.

Methodology

This paper looked at the implications of politicizing Nigerian university education Content analysis method was employed for the paper. For the purpose paper we used both primary and secondary data. The data were collected from online and print materials. The data were collected from the following sources review of published articles from reputable international journals such as CEON, Elsevier, Hindawi, JSTOR, IEEE, Learn Techlib SAGE, Nebraska and Springer.

Conceptual Framework

University Education Politicization

University education politicization means the running of universities based on the political influence of the political actors in government. University education politicization is the application of politics in the administration and management of universities. University education politicization implies the use of power and influence in the management of universities to suit the interest of political groups. University education politicization is the part used by political organs of government to run the universities through the appointment of key officers of the universities that makes policies and takes decision for the universities. Nigerian public universities have been politicized in the following ways;

In the area of leadership appointments, Politics is been played in the selection process and appointment of principal officers of public universities in Nigeria. Chukwuaguzie et al, (2021) did a study on the Influence of Politics on the Appointment of Vice Chancellors, Members of Governing Councils and other Principal officers and the study shows that partisan politics, ethnic bias, sectional factors, religious bias, favouritism, the quota system and catchment area policy significantly influenced the appointment of vice-chancellors, members of governing councils and other principal officers in public universities in the North-West States of Nigeria. Also, Dunn (2009) and Mishra (2012) points out that governors and the president more often than not lead the way in shaping the general fiscal policies that influence public universities and also appoint members of governing councils, vice chancellor and other principal officers which place them in commanding position to influence the management of public universities.

In the area of recruitment, the Nigerian university system is also politicized in the area of recruitment of both principal officers and other personnel in the universities. For instance, the Federal Minister of education in Nigeria accused the state governor of hijacking the appointment of the vice-chancellor of state universities. In December 2020, (Nwodm, 2021) concluded that authorities of the University conducted recruitment exercises for academic and non-academic positions in the Institutions. A total of 125 non-academic staff and 148 academic staff positions were filled at various levels in the various Departments and Faculties in the Institution. This was after over 5 years of non-recruitment of staff in the Institution. However, stakeholders in the University, especially the Academic Staff Union of Universities, (ASUU) faulted and kicked against the process and guidelines as not following due process. For instance, it accused the administration of not making the job vacancies open by advertising them to members of the public, both locally and internationally. This flouted the first process stipulated by the recruitment policy of the University. This process seemed to be hijacked by persons in authority and politicians outside the University to favour specific candidates in the process. The union threatened a local industrial action if the process was not reversed. There was palpable tension on Campus over the threat by ASUU. The stance of the Union was based on the fact that there was no form of competitiveness in the selection process because it did not give qualified and quality personnel a fair chance of applying for the vacant positions thus sweeping merit under the carpet. Not following this initial procedure creates room for maneuvering the process as favoured candidates are most likely to be recruited during the exercise.

In the areas of establishment, planning and location of new universities in Nigeria, members of the Nigerian House of Representatives **recently** rejected a plea to stop bills seeking the creation of tertiary institutions amidst a cash crunch, noting that they promised their constituents tertiary institutions during campaigns. Mr. Wase, the Deputy Speaker, observes that to halt university bills would mean putting the political ambition of lawmakers in jeopardy because some have promised their constituents tertiary education. According to him, "You know how politicians behave sir. When some people don't hear their community mentioned, whether the bill will be signed or not, it is also negative, politically. Those who have gotten the scores have gotten. Those who have not gotten it, if you say don't do that you may also be putting their opportunity in jeopardy. I am sorry to say it is life". The issue is political. Also speaking against the proposal, Mr. Elumelu, said lawmakers are under pressure from constituents on the establishment of a university. He noted that there is an expectation from constituents regarding the establishment of universities.

Mr. Elumelu, I think it is not wise to shut down every voice or every member on this floor as it relates to sponsoring a bill for the establishment of either college of education or polytechnic or university in their various communities. "Mr Speaker, said this because when you go home (constituency) and you are talking to your people (constituents), most often, the first thing they ask you is 'why are you not bringing any school to your constituency?', and when you say it is not possible and they see your colleagues sponsoring the same bills for the establishment of universities, it becomes a negative for you as an individual who is representing them". Ogunode & Musa (2022) agrees that the establishment of tertiary institutions especially universities has been turned into (a constituency project, meaning in the long run every constituent will have a university or a college of education in Nigeria. The establishment of tertiary institutions in Nigeria has been politicized to the extent that every state governor must at least establish one in his local government before leaving office (Premium times, 2022; Punch. 2022).

Olayinka, (2018) and Ogunode& Musa (2022) submitted that location of universities in Nigeria has come under great political influence. Universities are not located based on needs and national interests but based on political interests and influence. Okoli et al, (2016) opined that there has been political interference in the establishment of universities in Nigeria. With the return of civil rule in 1999, the spate of government's establishment of Federal universities continued, beginning in 2002 when the Obasanjo administration resuscitated the National Open University Nigeria Lagos, which was suspended in 1984. Ogunode & Agape (2021) and Ogunode,

&Omenuko, (2021) observed that political influences are a major problem hindering the effective planning of university education in Nigeria. Nigerian politicians both at the legislative arm and executive arm of government are always influencing siting of universities in their states, local government and towns. Strategic planning on university distribution is always been altered to favour politicians in power because educational planners are influenced to site universities in their communities. Nigerian politicians have taken the establishment of universities as constituent projects. Bills are sponsored every year by honourable members of National assembly for universities establishment in their state and senatorial district. Ogunode & Agape (2021) concluded that politicians both at the federal and states level especially those at the position of president and state governors influence the location of higher institutions in their states and communities to attract development and achieve political gain by altering the national document on siting of educational institutions in the country. Presently, a university of transportation has been cited in Katsina state, the state of the current president. Ogunode & Agape (2021) states that a *bill to establish Aerospace and Aeronautics University in Oka Akoko, Ondo State*, passed second reading on the floor of the Nigerian Senate. The bill was sponsored by Senator Prof. Boroface representing a northern senatorial district in Ondo state. The university would be sited in the home town of the senator in Ondo state.

In the area of student admission, Ogunode & Musa (2022) agrees that admission in some public universities is hijacked by political officers. They sent their candidates to various vice-chancellors. Ogunode et al, (2020) maintains that politicians in Nigeria influence admissions for their family members and themselves even when they don't meet the standard. Alika, (n.d.) opined that appointment and promotion of staff as well as admission and assessment of students at the tertiary levels, especially the public universities, are heavily tainted by corruption, nepotism and egregious discrimination in favour of indigenes of states in which universities are located, beyond and in violation of prescribed guidelines. The violation is perpetrated with impunity because JAMB officers are either complicit or ineffective. Discriminations like this create disaffection towards the country by their victims, with implications for national solidarity and security. Another challenge facing the management of higher institutions in Nigeria is the involvement of political forces in the admission process. Much preference has been given to political considerations rather than due process and merit systems in students' admission into higher institutions in Nigeria (Pinga et al, n.d.; Osuji, 2011). Aboh (2014) argues that in Nigeria and other corrupt countries of the globe, admissions are sometimes given to students because such students are from the same family, religious background or political affiliation with the person in authority.

Implications of Politicization of University Education in Nigeria

There are many implications of playing politics with the university system in Nigeria. Some of the implications include; a fall in standard university education, poor management, poor international rating, poor development, corruption and strike actions.

Fall in Standard University Education

The major implication of university education politicization in Nigeria is that it has led to a fall in the standard of university education. The introduction of political influence in the administration of the university system has led to a crisis in the system. When leaders appointed to head the universities are selected based on ethnicity, religion and indigeneship, the effects would be bad leadership which will affect the standard of the system. Punch (2021) submitted that the acrimony and vitriol accompanying succession to the post of vice-chancellor in most public varsities offer a sad commentary on the abysmal level the nation's academic community has sunk into. The negative nuances of politics crippling the country's vital sectors appear to have been smuggled into university education to the detriment of robust scholastic exercise. The estimable town and gown concept is eroded, and the gown now emulates the town's way of life instead of otherwise. The university, as a microcosm of society and purveyor of the finest intellectual values, is critical to nurturing society with developmental ideals and striking

innovations. And as the principal academic and administrative officer of a university, the tasks of a vice chancellor involve providing leadership, academic and administrative, to the entire university community; representing the university externally, both within the country and overseas; securing a financial base sufficient to allow the delivery of its mission, aims and objectives and carrying out important ceremonial and civic duties. But sadly, this is not the picture here. The appointment of vice-chancellors in many public universities is often hinged on selection based on the primal sentiments and influences of powerbrokers. Merit is pathetically ensnared, and the VC is handpicked based on politics and nepotism, exploiting the divisive tendencies among staff and management without tangible attention to academic and administrative acumen. Wrangling, litigation and pettiness have unseated quality research, teaching and training, the hallmarks of university education. Also, Ojo quoted by Dailytrust (2021) agrees that when recruitment and promotions are compromised, it would affect the quality of graduates. He said: "Recruitment and promotions based on nepotism will no doubt affect the quality of our graduates". The standard is already compromised by tribalism cum primordial sentiments. Many of our graduates are unemployable. According to Schmidt (2006), presidents and governors often handpick vice-chancellors to bring public universities under partisan control. Elujekwute (2019) stated that vice-chancellors are appointed by President/governor to erode public universities' autonomy, and academic freedom and undue political interference in the management of the public universities, thereby lowering productivity and academic standards.

Poor Management

The politicization of university education in Nigeria has also led to poor management of universities in Nigeria, especially public universities. Okoli, Ogbondah et al, (2016) argues that in an era where many key university appointments and decisions are made outside the university, meritocracy is eroded and replaced with nepotism, godfatherism, lobbying and political patronage. This usually results in a system where the most eligible persons are often frustrated and left without promotions. The survival of the university education system is directly proportional to or to a large extent dependent on the institutionalization of autonomy. Majority of the universities are underdeveloped because the best brain is not in the system to manage them for success. None of the Nigerian universities is rated among the best five hundred in the World ranking. This poor performance is due to weak administrators and other challenges. Udida et al, (2009) noted that some individuals appointed as vice-chancellors of some university are weak, not competent and lack administrative potential; such appointees must possess administrative qualities and must lead by example. The leader must have integrity, must be knowledgeable, and practice modern types of management leadership styles. He or she must be visionary and ready to adjust to situations in the system. The performance of the administrator should be sustained through the proper utilization of material and human resources in the achievement of institutional goals and objectives. A lot of higher education system managers do not possess the charisma or good human relations needed for effective and efficient leadership. As a result of the poor leadership and ineffective style of administration, a lot of programs or activities are not carried out in such institutions such as the provision of grants for research and publications, staff welfare is neglected, no adequate control of staff and students, no vision for the university. Such leaders also do not have the zeal for supervision and monitoring of institutional activities. This can affect the system's performance in that, workers can result to a nonchalant attitude toward work and hence no sustainability or continuation of good track records of performance in the system. Nigerian Higher Educational System needs leaders who can position it to an envying height of success and progress, thus contributing to society's quest for self-reliance (Udida et al, 2009). Ogunode & Musa (2022) observed that the political influence of the government in the administration of Nigerian universities have led to weak leadership in universities system. Ogunode (2020) noted that the appointment of weak administrators in Nigerian public universities is another big challenge facing the administration of public universities in Nigeria. Many university administrators appointed to head public universities are not qualified and less

exposed to handling the administration and management of universities. Ajayi & Ayodele (2005) noted that government involvement in university governance through the appointment of political patronage as vice-chancellors has been a point of shift between the government and academic staff union of universities (ASUU) for some time now and this negates effective and efficient management of public universities in the area of study.

Poor International Rating

The politicization of university education in Nigeria has led to poor international ranking. Ogunode & Musa (2022) stress that the low rate of Nigerian public universities can also be linked to the government domination of the universities administrations. The university administration and management in Nigeria are politically influenced and this is causing a lot of problems in the system. The best brains are not appointed to manage the system, necessary resources are not provided and the political will to provide adequate funding for the development of the universities is lacking in the political officeholders. Yawe et al, (2015) lament that the political interference in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria has degenerated so much that credibility is completely eroded, as principal officers of higher institutions such as vice-chancellors, deputy vice-chancellors, provosts, rectors and registrars among others are appointed based on political affiliations, sectionalism, nepotism, tribalism as well as religious beliefs. The implication of qualification not being the yardstick for the appointment of such principal officers is that any Tom, Dick and Harry can be given such sensitive positions which may make the entire system ineffective and inefficient. Ogunode et al, (2022) identified poor funding, poor research and teaching programme, insecurity, shortage of international staff, poor international outlook and political influence as the factor responsible for the poor rating of Nigerian universities in the international rating.

Corruption

The politicization of university education in Nigeria has led to corruption in the system. Some public universities in Nigeria have been engulfed with corruption. The corrupt practices in the university system are affecting its development. Godwin (2017); Ogunode et al, (2021) and Ogunode & Ahmad (2022) opined that the corruption in the management of tertiary institutions in Nigeria has hindered the effective recruitment of quality staff into the various tertiary institutions across the country. Recruitment processes are manipulated to favour their candidate in the system. Ogunode & Ahmad (2022) observed that Nigerian higher institutions are designed to be politically dominated. They are structured to only function based on the decision of government actors appointed as governing councils. The lapses helped the politicians to influence the recruitment exercise in the system. (Node, 2021) submits that both politicians and bureaucrats use the few available spaces as patronage to their allies, friends and relations undermining the rational policies and procedures for the recruitment of staff in the public institutions, such as universities. These are the underlying elements of corruption. (Kirya, 2019) noted that corruption and fraud in higher education are a global scourge that hinders human capital formation, especially in developing countries and that it ranges from the capture of universities to favouritism in admissions, diversion of funds, academic dishonesty and extortion. Punch (2020) laments that the little funds that go into the universities are stolen. In 2018, the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project claimed that there were allegations of corruption in several federal universities relating to the unfair allocation of grades; contract inflation; truncation of staff's salary on the payroll; certificate scandal; examination malpractice; sexual harassment; and issuance of results for expelled students to graduate and employment of unqualified staff. For instance, (Node, 2021) confirmed that in 2019, the authorities of Rivers State University advertised positions in the various Faculties and Departments. Hundreds and thousands of applications flooded the Institution. There were allegations that most of the candidates who applied were not even shortlisted nor were they invited for an interview, as the exercise turned into a ``who knows who`` exercise. In the end, a proper recruitment exercise was not conducted. Punch (2021) made it clear that a university should be a promoter of merit and a symbol of it. It

is neither for ethnicity, nepotism or national culture of sharing where the establishment of one is hinged on the geographical spread. When merit is abandoned, it creates room for graft, kills competitiveness and allows for dubious comradeship. Higher education is the fulcrum to galvanize youths towards ground-breaking feats.

Strike Actions

The politicization of university education in Nigeria has led to prolonged strike actions by different union groups in the universities. Government is continuous and when one administration entered into an agreement or contract with a third party, it is expected of the new government that comes on board to continue with the implementation of the agreement or contract. Due to politics in Nigeria and political instability, the Nigerian government at different time had reached an agreement with different union groups in the Nigerian public universities and has failed to honour the agreement once there is new administration on board. For instance, the former administration in Nigeria in 2012 reached an agreement with the various unions in the public universities on funding and other issues. The new government that came in is claiming they cannot implement such agreement. The failure to implement the agreement led to a prolonged eight-monthly strike by almost all the unions in the public universities (Onoyeme, 2012). The implication of the prolonged strikes on the students, lecturers and universities cannot be quantified. The effects of the strike on the students according to Adanwa&Ogunode (2022) include prolonged graduation, poor academic performance, social vices, learning loss, unstable learning programme, increment in learning cost, foreign education, mental health challenges, waning interest in the educational system, brain drain, waste of accommodation rent while Murtala et al, (2022) opined that the effects on the academic staff has resulted to health challenges, brain drain, low productivity, manpower wastage, a backlog of workloads, and suspension of research. This also causes political and economic turmoil which is often the backdrop of rising negative emotions such as increased hunger, a lack of work freedom, and income inequality for the staff involved. The presence of this turmoil may contribute to the negative emotions of the academic staff that are on strike. The effects of strike action on the Nigerian higher institution's programs or goals according to Ogunode, Ugochukwu&Jegede (2022) included suspension of the teaching programs, research programs, community service programs and programs of accreditation of the various higher institutions. The paper also established that strike actions led to a poor rating of higher institutions, reduction in internally generated revenue of the higher institutions, reduction in the quality of higher education, prolonged academic calendar, the poor academic performance of students and brain-drain. Musa (2019) advised the federal and state government to stop playing politics with the educational system, especially the university education in Nigeria.

Development of the Universities

The politicization of university education in Nigeria has affected the development of university education in Nigeria. When the management and administration of universities are under the handle of people appointed based on political consideration, the resultant effects will be underdevelopment. Many federal and state universities have fails to develop because of the politics in the system. Nwaka, (n.d.) observed that appointments to most of the positions in higher institutions are sometimes politically-motivated, hence mediocre staff are appointed to manage affairs though, inefficiently and as result education processes and resources are wasted and consequently, poor goal achievement. This has become more apparent when because in Nigeria, the state bears much responsibility for the governance and financing of public universities. It was also alleged that the appointment of vice-chancellors is ethnically, religiously or sectionally influenced. The politics associated with the appointment of vice-chancellors of the universities could be punctuated by rancour, bitter infighting and at times open confrontation which could have serious consequences for the effective management of public universities. The ethnicity, religion bias, sectionalism and quota system could be brought into play depending on the ethnic, religious, sectional or ideological composition of the council and the senate. Knott &

Payne (2006) cited in Akpakwe&Okwo (2014) agrees that governors or visitors may be concerned with appointing qualified heads of higher institutions, the power of appointment is the subject of occasional abuse by visitors or governors who choose to play politics with higher education. The implication of this for personal management in public universities is the likelihood of vice-chancellors and other principal officers appointed or elected based on ethnic loyalty and sectional politicking, showing bias in favour of those from their ethnic, religious or sectional background who may have helped them to power and by so doing, may contribute to the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of their public universities. Ogunode& Musa (2022) concluded that such actions can lead to the underdevelopment of universities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Nigerian public universities are characterized by many challenges that include inadequacy of funding; low staff motivation; the brain drain syndrome; disproportionate staff-student ratio; and scanty research feats. Examination fraud; students versus host community clashes; cultism; students' indecent dress code; drug abuse; violent behaviour and sexual harassment; shallow teaching; financial exploitation of students by lecturers, poor planning and supervision. Recently, some other challenges appear such as the indigenization of principal officers and university education politicization among others. This paper discussed the implications of university education politicization in Nigeria and the paper concluded that the implication of university education politicization in Nigeria has led to fall in standard of university education, poor management, poor international rating, under-development, corruption and strike actions.

Based on these challenges, the paper made some recommendations such as:

1. The federal and state government in Nigeria should grant full autonomy to public universities. This will help to prevent political influence in the administration and management of public universities in Nigeria.
2. The Educational Administrators and national assembly should provide a policy that would ensure that political influence is not allowed in the administration of universities in Nigeria.

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